

Friend, Foe, or Frenemy? : The Complexity of Gifted Friendships

“When gifted children are asked what they most desire, the answer is often, ‘a friend’. The children’s experience of school is completely colored by the presence or absence of relationships with peers.” (Silverman, 1993, p. 72)

Differences in Friendships of Gifted Kids

- Some gifted kids are directive (i.e., “bossy”) when playing with others
- Gifted kids typically have interests advanced beyond others and causes trouble with sharing similar activities & results in social isolation
- Some need to learn to be tactful about parading their skills in front of less able classmates
- Others are reluctant to display their talents
- Don’t want to be put down or teased
- Some are caught in the “Robin Hood” effect where teachers rob time from gifted children to support less able students. (may compromise friendship possibilities/uneven power) (Louise Porter)

“. . .the friendship expectations of intellectually gifted students differ significantly from those of their age-peers of average ability, while the conceptions of friendship held by very highly gifted students bear little resemblance to those held by the considerable majority of children with whom they are likely to be grouped for purposes of instruction and, ironically, for purposes of socialization.”
Dr. Miraca Gross

Peers? Friends? Both?

- Peers may vary depending on intellectual ability, intensities, sensitivities and temperament
- Peers have similar interests and ability levels/Different peers for varied interests
- Some gifted children have friends who are approximately the same age, ability and share similar interests but often have friendships with those who are older (even adults)
- Friendship concept broadens to emotional intimacy/ More developed concept of friendship than typical age peers
- May need many or few friends (some have books, pets as friends); Levels of introversion
- Girls develop more quickly than boys; expect more intimate friendships earlier
- May appear socially inept when they are really socially advanced; especially when younger

Different Levels of Friendship at Different Times for Different Purposes

1. **Play partner** – the earliest stage of friendship, where the relationship is based on play
2. **People to chat to** – sharing of similar interests (but interests are general and social, rather than specific)
3. **Help and encouragement** – includes some elements of intimacy, with the friend being seen as someone who will provide support and encouragement (tends to be one-way, rather than reciprocal)
4. **Intimacy/empathy** – deepening of intimacy, an emotional sharing and bonding that goes both ways
5. **The sure shelter** – the highest conceptions of friendship as a relationship of fidelity and unconditional acceptance (Gross, 2002)

Friendfluence

- Deep roots and a long reach
- Peers are powerful; group belonging needs emerge in full force in early adolescence
- Screenmates: How technology affects friendships (Flora, 2013)

Changing Nature of Screenship (Times are Different)

- Media pressure to have a BFF
- Facebook and other social media list the number of friends (implication is that more is better)
- Adding and dumping friends just needs the click of a button (implies the disposable and impermanent nature)
- Ethics of being “friends” with someone who embraces views that are anathema to personal values
- Cyberbullying is on the rise, especially among teens. See:
<https://www.nagc.org/sites/default/files/Publication%20PHP/NAGC-TIP%20Sheet-Cyberbullying%20%20Gifted%20Children.pdf>

The Challenges of Frenemies

Refers to either an enemy pretending to be a friend or someone who really *is* a friend but also a rival. The term is used to describe personal, geopolitical, and commercial relationships both among individuals and groups or institutions.

- The seductive nature of someone who is similar in interests/passions but proves to be untrustworthy
- Inner conflict of authenticity
- Compassionate nature of some may incline some to “save” others where they see potential
- Difficulty in communicating clearly and honestly; sensitive to others’ feelings
- May be reluctant to ask for support or advice from others for fear of appearing to gossip

The Challenge of Friendships

- Intensity of friendship may prove difficulty with separating
- Life changes may dictate necessary friendship intensity without understanding of how this affects the relationship
- Assist in learning the language of feelings for precise expression
- Observe and provide commentary on relationships that flourish and flounder (e.g. “It looks like Sophie is upset with Amelia—how do you think I can tell? What do you think?”)
- Provide tools for modulating stress, particularly in close relationships
 - *Yoga, Mindfulness practices, Deep breathing; Calming techniques, Savoring, Deep Listening*
- Develop “social stories” for new/novel situations then Role play or coach via text or email (Kane, 2016)

Tips to Form Friendships

Places to look

- If you have a friend, look at her circle of friends. The same thing that attracted you to the friend you have may be found in those she likes as well.
- Reconnect with people you used to be friends with.
- Join a club focused on an interest. You’re guaranteed to meet people with at least one thing in common with you.
- Volunteer. There is nothing that builds camaraderie like serving alongside someone.
- Start with a pen pal. Try www.postcrossing.com.
- Keep it in the family. Dr. Dan Peters recommends cousins. “Cousins have a great potential to be a bridge to developing relationships outside the family. They share the same gene pool, and they have some of the same built-in characteristics, the same environmental exposure.”

Source: <https://www.us.mensa.org/learn/gifted-youth/insights-into-gifted-youth/making-friends/how-to-find-friends/>

References

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APPS

Stop, Breathe, and Think: Free mobile app that is suitable for young people and contains mindfulness and compassion exercises. Children as young as 2-3 can begin to access mindful sitting for brief periods of time.

Calm: Free website and mobile app with guided meditation and relaxation exercises

Insight Timer: Free mobile app with many variations of bells and tones to help guide practice

Contact Information

Prepared for *Conversations with CAGT* by:

Michele Kane, Ed.D.; Professor Emerita of Special Education; Former Coordinator of MA in Gifted Education Program; Northeastern Illinois University; Email:m-kane1@neiu.edu